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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's briefing on a wide range of international issues, including humanitarian aspects in the context of developments in Ukraine, Moscow, June 30, 2023

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Good morning.

The situation around the world is evolving rapidly, following varying paths and trends. The more frequent our meetings, the better it is for you to be able to keep your viewers, readers and listeners informed about the position of the Russian Federation. For us this is also useful. Make no mistake, listening to journalists' questions gives us new insights and helps us draw conclusions regarding the interests of those you are working for. After all, we are addressing a wide audience through you. Awareness about what matters to the average person has principled importance for us.

The current events reflect the fundamental transition from centuries-old Western dominance to a more democratic multipolar world with better justice for all. The West is doing everything it can to resist this trend by devising containment strategies and seeking to suppress its competitors, i.e., anyone acting independently in international affairs guided by their own national interests instead of following the so-called rules imposed by the United States and its allies.

What we are witnessing right now is a fierce effort to prevent Russia from emerging as an independent centre of gravity in the multipolar world order. It is for this reason that the West has been preparing for many years, and has now unleashed a war against our country by using as its proxy the Nazi regime in Kiev created by the Anglo-Saxons. Moreover, they have already said that the People's Republic of China is next in line. In fact, NATO's doctrines designate China as the main long-term challenge for the golden billion's hegemony. Their objective is to ensure that neither Russia, nor China, nor anyone else can build up their ranks by attracting like-minded countries to their side. They want to prevent BRICS from expanding its reach and enhancing its international standing, while also undermining integration processes in Eurasia within the EAEU, the CIS, the CSTO, the SCO, ASEAN and the Belt and Road Initiative.

The global majority refuses to live by the Western rules and stands for universal international norms with the UN Charter as their primary source of reference. Our objective consists of fulfilling all the principles contained in the Charter without exception and in full, rather than selectively, and considering their intertwined nature. The overwhelming majority of countries share this view.

Recognising that there is no alternative to the principle enshrined in the Charter whereby the sovereign equality of states lies at the core of the United Nations has paramount importance. The West has always disregarded this principle. In all its actions, it has never treated this tenet of the UN Charter as something real.

The United States is trying to prevent the democratic transition in international relations. This is an obvious fact. In this context, Washington and its allies have become increasingly open and unscrupulous in their attempts to exploit the secretariats of international organisations to pull through resolutions creating single-track mechanisms largely subjected to the Western agenda while bypassing the established procedures. By doing so they acquire or claim to acquire the right to hold anyone accountable that the United States and its allies view as undesirable, even though these

resolutions are adopted without consensus and do not confer any mandate on them.

This trend has become especially apparent in humanitarian affairs with the West seeking to pitch the public opinion against those who disobey. In this situation, ensuring strict and full compliance with the UN Charter by the states, as well as the secretariats of international organisations takes on a special sense of urgency.

In accordance with Article 100 of the Charter, the UN Secretariat must act impartially and cannot receive instructions from any government. We are aware of multiple instances where this requirement was blatantly violated. The challenge is for all states to not only reiterate their commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, but to put them into practice as well.

A second no less important goal is to bring the main UN bodies into sync with contemporary realities. I'm referring to the reform of the Security Council, where the West is disproportionately overrepresented. Of 15 members, the golden billion has six seats, which is unfair. We will push to expand UN Security Council membership as soon as possible to include the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Any attempt to add Western candidates to that list are counterproductive and absolutely futile. Their dominance is coming to an end. It is time to move on to equality. If everybody is in favour of democracy, let's not forget that international relations also need democracy.

Question: The head of United Russia's Commission for the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood and Deputy State Duma Speaker Anna Kuznetsova was appointed co-chair of the parliamentary commission to investigate Kiev's crimes against children. Can you tell us about the functions of this commission?

Sergey Lavrov: Children in armed conflicts are a much debated issue. Among other actors, people who seek to take advantage of the

“impartiality” of international organisations’ secretariats are trying to play this card.

As you may be aware, the UN Secretary General’s report was recently released, in which Russia was mentioned as a country implicated in a number of situations involving more than 100 children. We want things to be fair and have these discussions based on facts, which have not been presented to us so far.

One of the UN mechanisms – Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine – was created through abuse of procedure and consensus. They travel, talk to representatives of the Ukrainian regime, get information from them and use it to come up with their findings. They do not talk with the people who live on our side of the contact line, just like UN representatives never went to Donbass for eight long years, when we were still trying to implement the Minsk agreements. That is why information for these kinds of findings is obtained from the “interested party” itself, which, in this particular case, is represented by Kiev and its Western sponsors, including numerous non-governmental organisations funded by the Americans and their allies, which use their “pseudo-independence” to promote Western-approved ideas. We want things to be fair and just in this department. So, the parliamentary commission will work to obtain the real facts in order to analyse, summarise and present them to the public.

In May, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, visited Russia. We gave her a fairly substantial volume of materials, which, we hope, will not be ignored and will be used in the Secretariat’s future activities.

Speaking of war crimes and accusations of violations of international humanitarian law, our Western colleagues were not able to come up with many facts. We want them to substantiate their claims with specific information and evidence, but this almost never happens.

At the same time, there is ample evidence of atrocities perpetrated by the Ukrainian neo-Nazi battalions, where prisoners of war with bags

on their heads and their hands and feet tied were shot and their corpses thrown into pits, just like the Nazis did during the Great Patriotic War.

It's not just that they don't bother to hide these facts; these neo-Nazis are flaunting these scenes. They record them on video and post them online on social media. However, these seemingly uncontested confirmations of atrocities and violations of every conceivable law of war and international humanitarian law somehow continue to be ignored by various analytical processes at the UN Secretariat.

Question: After the armed mutiny, many have apprehensions as regards the stability of a major nuclear power. Is Russia stable today? Can you give us any guarantees that Russia will not sink into serious turmoil?

Sergey Lavrov: We are not obliged to explain anything or make assurances. We are acting in a transparent manner. President of Russia Vladimir Putin and all political forces in our country have made statements on this issue. If some people in the West have doubts, that's your problem. We also have serious doubts about the adequacy of many Western leaders that go on record as saying they understand that their voters are suffering but they are "obliged" to do this for the sake of Ukraine's victory over Russia. Is this an appropriate approach? Does this reflect national interests? You should not worry about our national interests. Thank you for your concern, but it's not worth worrying about. Russia has always emerged stronger from its troubles (and this is hardly more than a trouble). The same will happen this time. And, we already feel that this process is underway.

Many Western analysts recognise this. It is no coincidence – it's actually in line with Sigmund Freud – when all this started last Saturday, Western officials said that the facade of the Russian government had cracked and hence, they were doing everything right. In this way, they are acknowledging that they are fighting Russia. They believe that since there was an attempted mutiny, they have been doing the right thing in arming Ukraine. EU High Representative for

Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell urged the EU to double arms supplies. This is an indirect, but very clear admission as to who is fighting whom. So, thank you for your concern but we will deal with it.

Question: Is it realistic (in Russia's view) to reach at least any progress in implementing the Russian part of the grain deal in the remaining two-plus weeks in order to extend the agreement? Do we have any contact with the UN on this or is it already pointless?

Allow me to ask you a second question, please. Is Moscow considering the consequences for global food security in case of a potential withdrawal from the deal?

Sergey Lavrov: As you might remember, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres suggested this deal as a package in 2022. It consisted of two parts, each of which, as he emphasised, had equal weight. The first part was the agreement on Ukrainian grain exports from Ukrainian ports, and the second part consisted of the Memorandum between the UN and the Russian Federation. Under this memorandum, Antonio Guterres made a commitment to persuade the EU and the US to lift the sanctions that prevented the export of our fertiliser and grain via EU routes. The same "obstacles" made it impossible for Roselkhozbank to support our fertiliser and grain exports. It was disconnected from SWIFT. The agencies engaged in sea transport insurance (for instance, London-based Lloyd's) designated the Black Sea route as dangerous because of the hostilities there and thus demanded very high insurance rates. The West also took some actions that were supposedly technical but in reality prohibitive. I am proceeding from the premise that we continue exporting our fertiliser and food in any event. We are supporting the relevant transactions, circumventing geographical routes and the other technical obstacles created by the West. Our exports are expected to reach 50 million tonnes in the agricultural year of 2023. President of Russia Vladimir Putin spoke about this while assessing the situation last year. I am confident that our partners will not be affected.

The attitude of the West to this deal is outrageous. First, on June 29, 2023, the US and the UK published a supporting document in which they were trying to prove that our fertilisers and food were not under the sanctions. The falsity of this assertion is clear to everyone who took an interest in the situation in this area at least once. Second, as for the Ukrainian part of the package, we have repeatedly cited facts showing that they are exporting grain for commercial purposes but not to the poorest nations. Meanwhile, initially, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres justified his proposal by the need to help those African states that were threatened with famine. As of June 29 of this year, 32.5 million tonnes of grain have been exported from Ukraine since the Black Sea Initiative entered into force. This included primarily corn (over 50 percent), sunflower oil, and wheat (less than 30 percent). The main recipients of the cargo: the European Union (almost 40 percent), the PRC (24 percent), and Türkiye (about 10 percent). A bit over 2.5 percent of the grain was exported to the poorest nations that are on the World Food Programme (WFP) list.

If the Black Sea Initiative is terminated, we will supply the poorest nations with comparable or larger amounts of grain at our own expense, that is, gratis. President Vladimir Putin has already announced this.

During the time the deal was functional, two WFP ships left Ukrainian ports every month with cargo for the needy countries. While at the same time, 90 ships with commercially sold grain sailed. This is the difference. So this deal on Ukrainian grain has long been about commerce.

Now, many EU countries are protesting against further Ukrainian grain imports without phytosanitary inspections and tariffs because this is “killing” farmers in the European Union itself. If this is so and if the EU is concerned about food security, let it buy and send excessive grain to the developing nations as we are doing by regularly supplying the needy countries with free grain and fertiliser. But in 2022, the EU seized these ships in its ports. We have to go through enormous difficulties to release this cargo for the African countries and had to

demand assistance from international organisations for this purpose. So, don't be concerned over global food security. What is needed is to take actions that will strengthen it. This means the EU sending surplus Ukrainian grain to Africa and urgently releasing our remaining fertiliser stuck in EU ports.

A terrorist attack on the Togliatti-Odessa ammonia pipeline was yet another drop in the cup of patience. The UN Secretary-General mentioned this pipeline in his proposals and it is part of the package. Meanwhile, Vladimir Zelensky personally blocked the resumption of the operation of the ammonia pipeline with demands for political terms. Then the pipeline was simply blown up. I don't see the point of the argument of those who would like to continue the implementation of the Black Sea Initiative. It has long become a commercial venture for Ukrainian grain.

Question: Recently, there was a parliamentary investigation in Russia into the US biological laboratory activities in Ukraine. Today, senators and deputies will hold the first meeting of the parliamentary commission to investigate the Ukrainian government's activities. What's your take on the importance of this investigation, and what efforts are Russian diplomats taking now and will take next to make sure the results of these investigations reach the rest of the world?

Sergey Lavrov: We believe this is an important initiative launched by our parliamentarians.

The first initiative you mentioned – the investigation into the Pentagon's biological programmes in Ukraine – was widely covered and attracted public attention. We presented this report at the UN and held a special Security Council meeting with China's support. Other Security Council members from developing regions showed serious concern and mentioned it, to varying degrees, in their statements. This issue is not closed yet. The Russian Defence Ministry continues to provide the international community with materials that raise serious questions and lead us to believe that the Pentagon has been developing what is commonly referred to as biological weapons in

laboratories in Ukraine. According to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, this is what it is. It is no coincidence that the Americans, who have “scattered” such laboratories across numerous regions (including several laboratories in neighbouring countries like the PRC, in Central Asia and the South Caucasus), are single-handedly blocking an initiative that we have been promoting for a long time now to adopt a mechanism for verifying compliance by all countries with the Biological Weapons Convention. This does not sit well with them, which is further, albeit indirect, proof of the fact that the plans of the US biological programme in foreign countries are by no means harmless or innocent. According to the Americans, it is all civilian activity and has no military dimension, but if that’s the case, why not conduct this “civilian research” in your own country? One of the reasons for this being done outside the US (besides creating risks for the countries in question) is that the Americans don’t feel like conducting dangerous experiments at home and want to be on the safe side.

With regard to the second recently announced parliamentary study, it will be led by Deputy Federation Council Speaker Anna Kuznetsova. Of course, we are worried about the children in conflict zones. Many of our foreign partners have raised this issue with us. They noted numerous and loud accusations coming from Kiev and its Western sponsors.

I can confirm what President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly stated to the effect that all the children currently residing in Russian territory are known, and no one is hiding their names or whereabouts. If these children have parents or close family, they have every right to take them home. This has been done many times: scores of children have returned to their relatives when they turned up. Some children ended up in Russia because they were staying in children’s homes and there were no relatives nearby. We did evacuate children’s home residents from the war zone along with staff and teachers. We are not hiding this, and our Western colleagues should not try to make a crime out of it. There are none on our side, but there are quite a few big issues on

the Ukrainian side concerning children and other war crimes that I mentioned earlier.

Since they are dealing with the children who are being allegedly forcibly held in the Russian Federation, the Europeans would benefit from seeing what is happening to Ukrainian children in Europe. We have received many complaints from Ukrainian citizens who left for Europe as refugees about children being forcibly taken from them by the guardianship authorities.

I think our parliamentary commission will look into this issue as well. Our Western partners should stop pretending that the Kiev regime is impeccable. It has a clearly racist and Nazi nature. Publicly, through the president, ministers, and other officials, this regime has declared its goal of outlawing and killing Russians. Has any European democratic figure ever questioned this? I don't want to offend anyone, but I haven't read anything about it in the Western media.

Question: I would like to ask about the recent report to the UN Security Council presented by UN Secretary General Antynio Guterres, which named Russia as the country responsible for violations of children's rights in Ukraine in connection with the deaths of children in 2022. However, the Ukrainian side is not mentioned in this report in any way. What do you think of this statement by the UN Secretary General? What are the reasons for such a statement? Do you associate this statement with the International Criminal Court finding the President of the Russian Federation and the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights guilty of violating these rights and issuing a warrant for their arrest? Does Russia plan to take any action in connection with this report?

Sergey Lavrov: UN Secretary General Antynio Guterres mentions in his report 46 cases where children have been moved to the Russian territory. They were moved (although the Secretary General does not mention this term), not forcibly displaced. Children were moved without their parents' or guardians' consent. It was exclusively about the evacuation of minors to safe areas from the conflict zone. These

children are regularly featured in reports on Russian television. They stay in children's summer camps and talk about how they are doing. We have always told international organisations that we are ready to provide them with all the information if they are interested in gathering facts about those children or anything else concerning the situation in Ukraine during the special military operation. We did provide the information. But as a rule, it is not reflected in the documents of the UN Secretariat. Nor do they reflect the fact that since February 2022 we have received more than five million residents of Ukraine, more than 700,000 of whom are children. The vast majority of them came with their parents or other family members. And of those, only 2,000 are children from orphanages in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics who were evacuated along with the staff and carers of these institutions. All of them remain at various structures that are connected with children's homes. Indeed, 358 children were placed with families, not through adoption, but through temporary provisional guardianship or temporary custody. This form was chosen specifically in view of the fact that the children's parents may turn up. The parents have every opportunity to take their children away should they be interested in doing so.

About the reasons why UN Secretary General Antynio Guterres decided to mention us and not Ukraine. If we take the number of cases that cause concern in Ukraine, they are similar to the number of cases mentioned in the Russian section of this report. But for some reason Antynio Guterres decided that the same phenomena can be assessed in different ways and sometimes it is based on the need to qualify things, but at other times it is just mentioned in an impersonal way.

I said in my opening remarks today that we are alarmed by the West's policy of subjugating international secretariats and in fact privatising them. This is a serious problem. The secretariats are dominated by citizens of Western countries or developing countries who move to New York, get a second citizenship and no longer represent the interests of their historical homeland; instead, they focus on the interests of their new country. We know how these interests are promoted, what methods are used, without shame or scruples. I do not

see any other way here but to pursue the truth. We will do this through our own unbiased investigation, which will not be influenced by any interested parties, especially those who sponsor the Kiev regime.

We have addressed UN Secretary General Antynio Guterres and reminded him of the fate of Ukrainian refugee children in Europe. Their parents call our diplomatic offices, complaining and asking for help. We can only draw the European Union's attention to this (which we are doing now). We have sent a special appeal to Antynio Guterres. We will see how he reacts, to what extent he strives for objectivity in this matter.

Question: Economic, humanitarian and other ties between Finland and Russia are almost completely severed now. Do you believe they can be restored? What could serve as a platform for this to happen? Both countries' diplomatic missions have to deal with various problems, including funding for their activities. Is anything being done to settle these problems?

Sergey Lavrov: You delicately phrased your question, saying in the beginning that ties between Finland and Russia "are almost completely severed." A journalist, if he or she wants to be guided by the facts, needs to formulate a problem more accurately. Our ties did not "severe" on their own. It was Finland that broke off these ties through its government, who promptly discarded the long-standing traditions of neighbourliness and mutually beneficial cooperation with the Russian Federation and joined the most eloquent and enthusiastic participants in the campaign against Russia. It was not us.

We and Finland are neighbours and we have always been interested in a peaceful coexistence. We have done a lot to help Finland become independent. Russians always remember the good things that are done for them. However, some of our partners do not always remember the good things. Nevertheless, if Finland decides to return to a normal relationship, we are ready to consider a proposal from Helsinki. When and if we engage in a discussion on the framework of a

new relationship, we will take full account of the new status of Finland as a country that has joined NATO and of the document it signed with NATO, under which it allows this organisation to deploy its military infrastructure on the territory of the country. We cannot ignore this. There will be no business as usual in this situation.

As for the operations of our diplomatic missions, it was not us who initiated the sanctions that we must respond to, and we are doing this. It was not us who initiated the drastic worsening of the atmosphere in the relations between our two countries, including diplomacy. Honestly, I don't believe we need to maintain diplomatic contacts at the same level as in normal times, before the West declared war on us through Ukraine's Nazi regime.

Question: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday he believes the Ukrainian conflict will be resolved via diplomatic means, through negotiations. Has the United States sent any signals about their readiness to negotiate a settlement plan for Ukraine and is it seeking contacts with Moscow in this context?

Sergey Lavrov: It is a strange statement. I've heard about it. However, it was made almost simultaneously with other statements by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the heads of the US National Security Council, and European Union and NATO officials that first Ukraine needs to win and carry out a successful counterattack and only then will the West engage in negotiations. It is a schizophrenic situation when they say that everything will be resolved through negotiations but first Russia must be defeated.

Another aspect is what they see as a basis for negotiations. The United States, NATO and the EU have many times said in a chorus firmly and uncompromisingly that the only basis for negotiations is Vladimir Zelensky's notorious "peace formula", which consists of 10 items. It contains neutral – I would even say banal – points that have been included in the plan for no obvious reason, such as the need to ensure food and energy security, that is, things that have been undermined by Western sanctions. The main thing about the prospects for signing a

peace agreement is that first our country must withdraw beyond the border that existed in 1991, while the Russian leaders must be taken to a tribunal and Russia must pay reparations. Only after the fulfilment of these prerequisites will a peace agreement be signed. This is today the approach of the West when they talk about the need for negotiations and a peaceful settlement. This doubling and tripling of the personality does little to help take in the situation correctly.

In my opinion, they are trying to temporarily freeze this conflict, secure a ceasefire and bide their time, so they can again flood Ukraine with weapons, create new military infrastructure and transfer new long-range lethal weapons. At least, this scenario is favoured by American political scientists. Recently, Foreign Affairs published an article by Richard Haass and Charles Kupchan, who described exactly this scenario: achieving a cessation of fire and having a respite. Of course, Russia will also get a respite but Ukraine has the entire West behind it. So, they argue, the West will make Ukraine much stronger and then they will continue to achieve the goals stated in Vladimir Zelensky's "peace formula."

Demagogy never stood in the way of diplomacy when it was seeking to achieve certain objectives. However, diplomacy exists to make a distinction between artificial designs and reality.

Question: Despite pressure, the Greek people have not forgotten about the large Greek diaspora in the Sea of Azov area. We understand that the current government won't say or do anything. To what extent is Russia open to people's diplomacy with the involvement of citizens from unfriendly countries? Can Western Europeans come to Mariupol and help restore it? There are students that would like to communicate with local students. Some suggest teaching the Greek language because there is a shortage of Greek language teachers there. I've been asked by lawyers whether foreigners were invited to take part in the trial of Nazis in Rostov. We are surprised to see that Western Europeans are coming to Moscow and meeting with the Patriarch of Moscow. We are seeing that Muslims and Jews are showing initiative. Do Orthodox leaders or organisations have any

initiatives, especially now that Orthodox hierarchs are being persecuted in Ukraine, and churches and monasteries are being closed there?

Sergey Lavrov: You want to know whether Greece or Greek people's diplomacy can help the Greeks who live in the Sea of Azov area. Have these people's diplomatic organisations voiced this initiative?

Answer: Not organisations but in single cases there are individuals that are interested and worried...

Sergey Lavrov: If they ask you, please advise them not to ask but to formulate how they are ready to help, what they are ready to do and where. They can submit their proposals via the Russian ambassador.

A cardinal from the Vatican came to meet with the Russian leadership and Patriarch Kirill at the Pope's request. We are meeting with Jewish and Muslim communities. The communities that are interested in contacts can always establish them. I don't remember any offers of assistance or requests for contacts in order to establish facts and discuss opinions from the global Orthodoxy on behalf of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Nothing like this has happened. You do know that the Patriarch of Constantinople maintains very close contacts with the US, which is funding him. He is doing everything he can to wreck the global Orthodoxy. This is an obvious fact and the Americans do not even conceal it. They even have a representative on the freedom of religion who is doing exactly the opposite in every way. He is trying to persuade all local Orthodox churches to promote the idea of a "divorce" from the Russian Orthodox Church.

If you or your colleagues are interested in launching humanitarian projects in Russia (on Greek language teachers, for one, or something else), just make the proposals and send them to us. I see no problem in this at all.

You asked whether we could accept such proposals from citizens of unfriendly countries. We don't have unfriendly people. It would be more precise to say that we have unfriendly governments. As for

people, we have never had any problems with them, including the Greek people.

Question: About a year back, the countries around Serbia – in fact, NATO – prevented you from visiting Belgrade. Is a new attempt being contemplated? What is the level of official contact between Moscow and Belgrade? Does it suit Moscow?

Sergey Lavrov: Indeed, a little over a year ago, in early June 2022, plans were in place for my official visit to Serbia. We regularly exchange visits with our Serbian friends. The West prevented this visit by forcing the countries bordering Serbia to refuse to open their airspace to our plane. We do not see any reason here to hold a grudge against our Serbian friends.

How can we make up for this lost opportunity? I agreed with my good old friend Ivica Dacic, Serbia's foreign minister, that under the circumstances, he would come to the Russian Federation. We are now considering an exact schedule.

I am not sure whether what I have said to you will result in further impudent demands from the West that Dacic should not go to Russia. At any rate, we have an agreement in this regard.

The West's behaviour is illustrated by the fact that in September 2022, we approved a schedule of consultations between our foreign ministries with Serbia's previous foreign minister, during the UNGA in New York,. Do you remember the hysteria of the US and European representatives? They said they condemned Serbia's signing of a consultation schedule with the Russian Federation at such a time. There is no remedy for this obsession that they have with their grandeur, an unshakable confidence in their rightness, in line with what I spoke about during my introductory remarks. The great "golden billion" dictates its "rules" to everyone, including on who to talk to and what and with whom to sign.

I hope the Serbian people will overcome the current complicated situation in which all kinds of efforts are being made to undermine

the ten-year-old agreement on the Community of Serbian Municipalities of Kosovo. Besides many other EU and US actions, attempts were made to organise municipalities in Serb-populated areas in northern Kosovo so that they lacked any Serbian representation.

We are united with the Serbian people in terms of advocating UNGA Resolution 1254 and all the principles agreed on by the international community and endorsed by the UN.

We have regular contacts with Serbia. We appreciate President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic and the country's ministers for always remaining open to contact with our ambassador. This is helpful. We always have the possibility of speaking by telephone. I am looking forward to Ivica Dacic's visit when he finds a convenient time.

Question: What is the situation following the flooding in Kakhovka? Is sufficient aid being provided?

Sergey Lavrov: We give regular updates on the Kakhovka hydro power plant. Local authorities release reports and videos. The Dnieper is back to normal. The flooding caused substantial damage which is being dealt with now. I think the damage to civilian structures will be promptly taken care of. The restoration of the dam itself will take some time. Work on this is in progress.

Question: You said there would be military specialists in the Central African Republic and in Mali. Will they be from PMC Wagner or the Russian Defence Ministry?

Sergey Lavrov: We have close military-technical ties with the Central African Republic and a number of other African countries.

Several hundred of Russian Defence Ministry instructors are operating in the CAR. They are there under an official state treaty to help the country's army train their officers. They have already trained several thousand service personnel. Both the president and the government of that country highly appreciate the quality of the training.

Regarding PMC Wagner, which also operated there as well as in several other African countries, they did that in agreement with the respective governments. As early as two years ago, in September 2021, Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop, speaking at the UN General Assembly (when rumours and speculations were circulating behind the scenes), said that the Republic of Mali was concerned about its security prospects because of the French government's decision to wrap up Operation Barkhane and a concurrent decision by the EU to leave Mali as well. This involved the liquidation of the French military bases in the north, that is, the most pernicious region where there were and still are grave threats from terrorist groups that arrived in Mali and other African countries following the bombing of the Libyan state by NATO, with France's participation. This transformed Libya into a "black hole" through which terrorists flooded the CAR, Mali and other countries.

The future of these agreements with PMC Wagner will largely be decided by the governments of the African countries concerned. They will determine to what extent they are interested in continuing that form of cooperation to ensure the security of the authorities.

Question: Is the UN investigating the tragic events in Ukraine during the Maidan, in Odessa, in Mariupol in 2014, and in Bucha in the spring of 2022?

Sergey Lavrov: We know nothing about this. We remind those whom it concerns that they should complete the investigation of these hideous crimes. The Maidan: February 2014. Odessa: May 2014. During these tragedies and crimes, which were broadcast live, those who fired at the people trying to jump out of the blazing Trade Unions House, were recording the events. They looked proud. They clearly pictured themselves as heroes of the fight against the Russians. At that moment, many people in Europe were outraged by these actions. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (we were a member of that organisation at the time) approved the decision – with moans and groans – to set up an advisory body intended to help the Ukrainian authorities to carry out an investigation. The investigation

was announced, but it came to nothing. The only thing they managed to achieve with regard to the Maidan events was to arrest members of the Berkut unit. They were persecuted. With regard to the Trade Unions House, as I understand, they are still keeping in custody the people who organised the anti-Maidan movement. In this context, you can forget about justice or fairness.

All actions by the Ukrainian authorities that are “cleansing” their legal system of all things that are somehow related to the Russian language, Russian education, and Russian media, are literally nurturing hatred.

Earlier today, I cited numerous cases, where the current Kiev authorities called for killing Russians. This was done, among others, by Vladimir Zelensky, who said that those who believed they were Russians should clear out to Russia, while those who are currently in the Kremlin will not die a natural death. His colleagues, such as Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba, a diplomat (in all likelihood, he learned diplomacy from Josep Borrell), declared a couple of months ago that making short work of the President of Russia would be enough to put an end to the war in Ukraine. By the way, he was addressing some Western non-governmental democratic institution. We have no illusions. Neither do we have any with regard to other signature crimes and “cases” that do not even have anything to do with Ukraine.

Take, for example, the Skripals. Recently we again recalled this case and asked the British to tell us where these Russian citizens were. We have not heard about them since 2019. It was announced that, highly likely, they had been poisoned by Russian intelligence officers. But no evidence was provided.

Or take the “poisoning” of Alexey Navalny. We have received no response to our numerous official requests addressed to Germany, Sweden, France, or the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Germany says that it cannot provide the complete samples because they were taken by the Bundeswehr and so we could

supposedly find out what secret biological weapons their military had. Later they ended up by handing the samples to the OPCW. We applied to the OPCW. Their spokesman said the Germans had forbidden them to give the “paper” to Russia. This is how they investigate these matters.

But let us not forget the latest cases related to Ukraine, such as the Malaysian Boeing, which was shot down over Donbass in July 2014. All 15 witnesses but one were anonymous: no names were given in court. The Americans said they had satellite photos proving that this had been done by the military from Donbass. Our lawyers asked them to submit the photos. They refused, and the Dutch court said that it took the Americans’ word for it. It’s like a joke where someone sat down to play cards not knowing the rules.

The latest case is Bucha, which became a pretext for yet another wave of sanctions and hysteria in the Western camp. Let me remind you that this provocation took place three days after the Russian troops were withdrawn from the town in the hope that Ukraine was going to support the Istanbul agreement. For three days, the mayor of Bucha addressed TV audiences saying that they were again “home” at last. On the third day, they showed dozens of corpses, and not those hidden in a garden but lying in the central street. Since then we have been asking them to give us at least the names of these people, let alone the investigation records. If an investigation is being conducted, that is.

In September 2022, while attending a UN Security Council meeting in New York, I publicly urged UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to use his influence to enable the international community to learn the names of those who allegedly had been “tortured to death” by the Russian troops. So far, there has been no reaction. I remind the Secretary-General about my request each time I see him. But it’s no use expecting at this stage, despite all our demands, an honest appraisal of the situation or an objective investigation from our Western colleagues and the UN Secretariat, which they have brought to heel.

Question: How are children, who were taken off from Russia during the special military operation, reunited with their parents or legal representatives? What status do children arriving in the Russian Federation have?

Sergey Lavrov: I spoke about this. You must have paid no attention. They are regarded as displaced persons. Some of them have temporary guardians. Scarcely any of them have been adopted, given that it is being clarified whether they have parents and whether the parents, if any, are ready to take them home. A number of foster children were at orphanages, where their living parents had consigned them. Judging by all appearances they did not plan any further reunification.

As far as the status and reunification of families is concerned, we organised a briefing at the UN Security Council, which was addressed by Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, who gave a detailed account on the matter. The children's names are online and everyone so wishing can access them. If parents learn that their child is somewhere in the Russian Federation and wish to take him/her, they have every opportunity to do so. Let me advise you to apply to Ms Lvova-Belova's office for a more professional answer (if the International Criminal Court has not banned this).

Question: What is the Foreign Ministry's position on the situation at the Zaporozhye NPP? Yesterday, Ukraine announced that it was holding anti-radiation exercises and handing out iodine. How grave is the threat that Ukraine is simulating? What is our country's attitude?

Sergey Lavrov: We comment on this regularly. We circulated an official document at the UN Security Council meeting yesterday, which confirms our serious concern over the facts of Ukraine's provocative behaviour. The Ukrainians are saying we will blow ourselves up while being present at a nuclear facility. Is there any need for comment? This is a sheer lie that is in keeping with the current Ukrainian leadership's style of behaviour. They palm off any insane rubbish as the most important issue of the day and urge the West to support these crazy initiatives.

Look at the tone they use talking to their Western partners. An aide to Vladimir Zelensky declared they were demanding that the upcoming NATO summit decide on launching the process of Ukrainian accession to the Alliance, otherwise Zelensky would not attend it. This is how they talk to their patrons on whom they fully depend both financially and in all other respects.

The Zaporozhye NPP: IAEA experts have been installed and rotated there for months. They send regular reports to Vienna, where the IAEA HQ is located. They can report even on a daily basis, if they so choose. These experts, like IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi, who visited the nuclear plant, are well aware who is shelling it. In recent time, there have been fewer artillery attacks, but they were regular in an earlier period. They know perfectly well that this is dangerous and will lead to no good. Their reply to all our admonitions that they should formulate this position officially and report what they see at the Zaporozhye NPP with their own eyes is, regrettably, that their mandate does not include a clause on identifying those to blame for the shelling. For this reason, they just write “artillery attacks.” Right now, we are asking them to indicate at least the geographical direction. This is not about identifying the culprits after all.

The Ukrainians are playing dangerous games. We know how they can stage-manage “tragedies.” As for the handouts of iodine and other medicine, they also staged Bucha and a “Russian” missile attack at the central railway station in Kramatorsk. But as it turned out, the missile was American. They stage-manage many other things. As you can see, the talents of the comedic performer make themselves felt. So, we have to adapt.

Question: In response to a question by our colleague from Finland, you said that you did not see the need for a diplomatic presence as it used to be in the past. You know that recently Bucharest made a similar request, asking to balance the numbers of the embassy staff . In your opinion, how far can the spiral of mutual restrictions and expulsions reach? In 2022, Dmitry Medvedev said it was time to “padlock the embassy gates.”

Sergey Lavrov: Indeed, this is what I said, and this is what I think. Any unbiased analyst will agree that the current situation, created by our Western partners (NATO and the EU), does not require the same intensity of diplomatic contacts as we used to have at the best of times, when we lived in an atmosphere of friendship, cooperation and neighbourliness, made joint investments and earned money, and our citizens traveled internationally as tourists. Now there is much less need for this, since 90 percent of our previous contacts have been frozen.

Yes, we do maintain a diplomatic presence in Finland, and they maintain theirs, but we do not need the amount of presence that we used to have. We want embassies and general consulates to operate properly, without problems related to salary payments and money transfers to maintain the premises in good condition. We did not initiate these problems, nor the diplomatic expulsions or demands to establish parity. We can establish parity, with a vengeance. But this is not our choice.

The vast majority of Western embassies in Russia employ Russian citizens, who are not included in the diplomatic staff quotas. We do not follow this practice and send that category of embassy staff from the Russian Federation. You can go too far by resorting to a tit-for-tat strategy. We are about to face a similar situation with the Americans and the British due to their initiatives concerning “cuts,” “banishments,” and persona-non-grata declarations.

Please recall how it all started with the Americans. Back in December 2016, Donald Trump won the presidential elections, but Barack Obama still had three weeks in office before leaving the White House. Just before the New Year, Obama “slammed the door” in order to leave Donald Trump a “legacy” in relations with Russia, or perhaps he was just venting his anger. He expelled several dozen Russian diplomats, and ordered to seize five Russian real estate properties protected by diplomatic immunity under interstate agreements. We waited until the summer for the Donald Trump administration to solve the problem, but they failed to do so. Then we started taking countermeasures. In

diplomacy, the principle of reciprocity applies to everything – to good attitudes and to concessions, as well as to rude behaviour.

Question: At what stage are the preparations for the Russia-Africa Summit? What African leaders are expected to come? What important documents are likely to be signed at the summit?

Sergey Lavrov: Preparations for the summit are at the final stage. We have entered the home stretch. Almost all countries have confirmed that they will attend. More than a half of the African countries will be represented by their top leaders, this despite the daily unashamed pressure and demands to cancel the visit or lower the level of representation. Such are our Western colleagues' "manners."

I want to remind everyone once again that at the start of the special military operation, we explained its reasons. President of Russia Vladimir Putin delivered an address that everyone watched or heard. The reasons for the SMO were piling up for years, starting with the deception as regards NATO's alleged non-expansion through the coup d'état that brought to power in Ukraine true-blue racists, who started banning the Russian language and urging the ouster of Russians from Ukraine. Today, I quoted them threatening to kill all Russians wherever they found them. All of this left us no alternative but to commence the special military operation. We explained our reasons in detail. The West has condemned this. But please leave everyone else alone, the Global Majority of the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Treat them as grown-up people. Respect their right to listen to Russian and Western assessments and decide on their own what their position will be. We never demand anything, we just explain our position. The West does not explain anything but says that "Russia is a threat and you must not have contacts with it because its days are numbered; beware of betting on the wrong horse." This is the sort of "diplomatic" manners that can be expected from them. I know this for certain.

I paid many visits to Africa over the last couple of years. I was told by my colleagues what brazen, shameless and unceremonious pressure they had to endure in terms of "democracy" and the West's attitude to

other countries and the UN Charter's demand to respect the sovereign equality of states. They do not care a whit about it. The only thing they are thinking about is that they are allowed to do anything, while the rest of the world can only do what the Golden Billion will permit them to do.

At the summit, the majority of countries will be represented by their top leaders. We are drafting an extensive declaration and a document that will set out mid-term plans of collaboration between Russia and African countries for several years. An economic forum and a media forum will be held on the sidelines of the leaders' meeting. This will be an event-packed summit held on several platforms. I am confident that it will be interesting.

Question: Can you confirm the UN data on civilian casualties in Ukraine? Do you think that the so-called special military operation has led to an improved humanitarian situation in Ukraine, Donbass and Russia's border regions?

Sergey Lavrov: As to the humanitarian situation, this is one of the goals of our special military operation. Were you satisfied with the developments occurring before the operation started, when back in the summer of 2021 President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky demanded that those who felt part of Russian culture should leave Ukraine for Russia, calling Russians "creatures" rather than people and his administration staff referring to them as "species" and "subhumans," and laws were adopted that destroyed all things Russian in Ukraine, including the lands where Russians had lived for centuries, building cities and developing the local economy, industry and agriculture? In parallel, Nazis are openly glorified and monuments to those who defeated Nazism during World War II are destroyed. Do you think this is a normal humanitarian situation? Is it a normal humanitarian situation, where, after the signing of the Minsk agreements – or even a year before, following the coup d'état – the shelling of civilian facilities such as schools, hospitals and kindergartens took place every day, despite the fact that those agreements were approved by the UN Security Council? Back then, when an OSCE mission was involved and

even some Bulgarian citizens were part of it, we still called on them to intervene and report the actual truth. For several years, they kept refusing to provide the data on who bombed whom and only reported the number of artillery attacks per week in the contact zone, plus the number of civilian facilities damaged and persons injured. We urged them to provide objective information, since they were employees of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. After numerous reminders (contrary to Kiev's demands not to publish these data, which was a well-known fact), they put the actual facts on the table, which showed that nearly all artillery attacks had been launched by the Ukrainian force, with the Donbass militia retaliating. The number of civilian casualties and destroyed facilities in that territory was five times greater than in the territory occupied by the Ukrainians.

Today, we regularly show on TV the consequences of Ukrainian attacks on civilian targets. I have never seen Ukrainian television or social media cover the destruction of some military site in Russia. This was never the case. Maybe I missed something, but even if I did, it was an isolated event.

Our armed forces and all those taking part in the special military operation do not attack civilian targets. Do not forget that even since its start there were many cases on record of the Ukrainian military deploying their heavy weapons in the courtyards of residential buildings, near schools, or even indoors. The evidence can be found online as well as on social media. It is mean to deliberately invite gunfire on heavy weapon positions located in the midst of civilian infrastructure. The Russian army never picks out civilian facilities as targets and never opens fire for no reason at all. Every attack is targeted at military infrastructure, while the Ukrainian side targets nothing but civilian facilities.

I would appreciate if Bulgaria, as a friend of the current Ukrainian regime, could provide any information on military targets that Ukraine hit in Russia to somehow justify what they perpetrate by shelling residential areas of cities.

As for losses, I have no information as to the source, from which the UN derives its data. At any rate, they have never addressed these questions to us.

Question: President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky suggested granting English international language status in the country, as well as moving up Orthodox Christian holidays, including Christmas, to new dates. We understand that people who have spoken Russian for generations will not immediately start speaking English and will not celebrate Christmas on December 25 on orders.

The Russian security services said that there are plans to move the valuables and relics from the Kiev Pechersk Lavra to Europe to protect them from alleged Russian missile attacks. It reminds one of the Great Patriotic War, when the enemy relocated trainloads of valuables that later disappeared God knows where. They were either stolen or resold. Will the Foreign Ministry monitor this? Will Russia try to recover these treasures?

Sergey Lavrov: We have already contacted UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. After making inquiries, she assured us that her organisation had nothing to do with this matter. But that was not our question. If UNESCO was involved, it would have been a violation of all standards and constitutional documents.

Regardless of whether anyone asked for help or not, UNESCO has the authority to investigate such cases and protect cultural heritage. There is a special list and the Kiev Pechersk Lavra is on it with all of its possessions, artwork, and interiors.

We continue our inquiries as to what is going on there and whether these reports have a leg to stand on. In particular, we are checking the recent information that several earliest icons that gave rise to the entire school of icon painting were delivered to the Louvre. Who created these icons and where they were kept was not explained – they just “arrived to the Louvre from Ukraine.” Museum workers confirmed this to journalists. However, when asked what kind of icons

they were and where they came from, the employees replied that this was a secret, as was for how long they will stay in the Louvre.

There are many journalists present here. Try to ask French museum custodians about this. This is important, including in order to preserve historical heritage and memory.

Question: The issue of Ukrainian children is related to the fact that the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for President of Russia Vladimir Putin. This creates the problem of guaranteeing the President's immunity during visits to international venues, for instance the BRICS summit in South Africa. Are you sure that Russia will be able to guarantee President Vladimir Putin's immunity?

Sergey Lavrov: The immunity of heads of state is guaranteed by international law and relevant conventions.

The ICC decision is not so much about immunity, as about the license characteristic of the Anglo-Saxons, who made Prosecutor Karim Khan (an ethnic Pakistani with a British passport) to slap together the arrest warrant for President of Russia Vladimir Putin and Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova in circumvention of all procedures and rules. Anyone who has ever met Maria needs no proof of the absurdity of the warrant.

The inviolability of the Anglo-Saxons is well known. They create it for themselves and demand that others do what they say and do not touch them. The former ICC prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, tried to institute proceedings against the US military for the crimes they had committed in Afghanistan. She was told that sanctions would be introduced against her and that she should not even think of it. The US adopted a law that prohibits implementing any ICC orders. There have been attempts to consider the real, undeniable facts of crimes the British and Australians perpetrated in Afghanistan. The court kept mum, thus proving that it is controlled from the outside, primarily by the Americans and the British.

We know that the warrants were sent out in violation of all rules. Ten million pounds sterling was allocated to investigate these “cases” in a targeted mode, even though the court must fund relevant processes from its budget in the order of precedence. Everyone who is ready to look at the ICC with unbiased eyes knows that this case is a bit too thin.

We, just like many other countries, including the US, China, and India, are not bound to anything by the ICC decisions. It is a clearly failed attempt to improve international criminal justice.

Question: This week, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians in Canada issued a report on security in the Arctic that pays much attention to the “Russian threat.” Ahead of its publication, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau expressed hope that cooperation with Russia would resume. How does Russia regard Western countries’ activities in the Arctic at this moment? What is the Foreign Ministry’s assessment of the Arctic Council’s efficacy, what with its presidency recently passing from Russia to Norway?

Sergey Lavrov: The Arctic Council was a unique mechanism promoting equitable, politics-free cooperation and helping to solve the problems of the Far North with an emphasis on the needs and interests of the small indigenous peoples of the North and on improving environmentally friendly industries and routes. Much was done and continues to be done.

This organisation’s politics-free status (that distinguished it during the gravest crises in the past decades) has been undermined by the Western countries and their obsession with isolating Russia everywhere. They started saying that it was necessary to “find a role” for NATO (there was nothing of the sort until recently) in ensuring safety of navigation. We ensure it on our own. The Northern Sea Route is Russia’s national waterway, with most of it passing through the Russian territorial sea. We are responsible for its security.

We always noted and obtained approval from our Arctic Council colleagues that there were no problems in the region that called for projecting military force to be solved. But NATO's "appetites" are growing: they have gobbled up Finland and are trying to talk Sweden out of burning the Quran so as to drag it into the alliance as soon as possible. These processes do not inspire much optimism. We will take them into account and adopt relevant military-technical measures.

In the greater scheme of things, cooperation is continuing at the non-governmental level. There are contacts between organisations of small indigenous peoples.

The fact that the Canadians refer to us as the "main threat" but are ready for cooperation is a sign of the West's inadequacy. The West is aware that it will have to be on neighbourly terms with Russia anyway (we and Canada are neighbours). But simultaneously they must toe the line laid down by Big Brother that urges them to stigmatise us, declare us a threat always and everywhere, etc.

Everything will go back to a more or less normal path of collaboration between Nordic countries, rather than to "its circuits" in due time. Our task is to assure the functioning of the Northern Sea Route. We are actively involved in expanding its potential and will take steps to ensure safety of navigation.

Question: The UN confirms 480 Russian attacks on schools and hospitals in Ukraine last year and accuses the Russian Armed Forces of using 91 children as a human shield. How can you explain this?

Sergey Lavrov: You did not listen to what I was saying until now, did you? I answered a similar question.

We do not understand what statistics the UN uses as the basis for its publications. We informed our UN colleagues that we would like to see the justification of their assertions. We have not seen a single confirmation of the fact that the Russian army engaged in deliberate shelling of civilian facilities.

That the Ukrainians, in violation of international humanitarian law and in committing war crimes, use civilian facilities to hold all sorts of meetings of mercenaries, Western generals, and Western instructors with their military is Ukraine's fault. If we spot "meetings" of this sort (like the one held in Kramatorsk the other day), we will destroy them. They are people who have declared a war on us.

I would ask NATO countries involved in training Ukrainians to pay attention to the fact that the Ukrainians constantly and regularly use civilian infrastructure to deploy their heavy weapons.

Spain also trains the Ukrainian special forces and servicemen. During the drills, Spaniards should not just teach them to kill Russians (as they ask) but also instruct them in the elementary rules of international humanitarian law. It is banned to deploy heavy weapons at civilian facilities. This is a war crime.

The UN must be interested in fact-finding. For our part, there are no limitations on handing them the relevant data. But the way they use these data is raising questions. I have mentioned our concern with the West's insistent and unceremonious attempts to bring to heel and privatise the UN Secretariat. There are many worrisome indications of this.

I hope that the understanding of the fact that the UN Charter requires the Secretariat to be neutral and unbiased will prevail. The principle of the sovereign equality of states will triumph and all countries, including NATO and EU members, will respect it. The UN will ultimately become the tool of multipolarity planned by the UN founding fathers. The Western countries have hampered its implementation for years in a bid to make the UN serve their interests, especially after changes occurred in our space and the USSR ceased to exist. For the last three decades, the West has tried to use the UN for its corrupt ends. But this cannot be crowned with success.

Everyone should return to the basic principles of the UN Charter and not only confirm them but also be guided by them in practice. I hope

that this appeal will not be called into question. This is an appeal for respecting the things ratified by all the members of the international community.